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ABSTRACT

To examine tactical self-presentations (images persons display publicly) in task-oriented leadership situations, 128 subjects (56 male and 72 female) were assigned leadership positions in groups that did very well or very poorly. The leaders learned that either they or the group-at-large were responsible for the performance and that the other group members either did or did not know the precise locus of responsibility. As predicted, males emphasized self-presentations of competence and prominence relative to their socioemotionality (the appearance of being warm, approachable, and interpersonally oriented) when the others did not know of the leader's responsibility for success, but relatively de-emphasized the former attributes when the others did know. Males also displayed some compensatory self-presentations following a leader-responsible failure, though the effects were not precisely as predicted. In contrast, females' self-presentations did not follow predictions; they normally emphasized their socioemotionality over other attributes irrespective of the combination of treatment. These findings are consistent with prior research generally indicating that females are more interpersonally oriented in group settings, while males are more task oriented. (Author/IRA)

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Self-Presentation in Task-Oriented Leadership Situations

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Self-Presentation in Task-Oriented Leadership Situations

Abstract

To examine tactical self-presentations in task-oriented leadership situations, 128 subjects were assigned leadership positions in groups that did very well or very poorly. The leaders learned that either they or the group-at-large were responsible for the performance, and that the other group members either did or did not know the precise locus of responsibility. As predicted, males emphasized self-presentations of competence and prominence relative to their socioemotionality when the others did not know of the leader's responsibility for success, but relatively deemphasized the former attributes when the others did know. Males also displayed some compensatory self-presentations following a leader-responsible failure, though the effects were not precisely as predicted. In contrast, females' self-presentations did not follow predictions; they normally emphasized their socioemotionality over other attributes irrespective of the combination of treatments.

Self-Presentation in Task-Oriented Leadership Situations

Through their self-presentations, people claim a variety of public images that influence how others regard and treat them in social interaction (Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, in press). Although people generally adjust their self-presentations to match what they believe a significant audience values, thereby attempting to increase their attractiveness in the others' eyes (Jones & Wortman, 1973), self-presentations are held in check by publicly known "facts" about the actor that could refute overly aggrandizing claims. For instance, people whose failures are a matter of public record present themselves consistently with that record; people are more self-aggrandizing when failures are only privately known (e.g., Frey, 1978; Schlenker, 1975). In addition, people who fail appear to compensate for the damaging information by enhancing their self-presentations on dimensions that are irrelevent to the failure (Baumeister & Jones, 1978). Thus, public failure should result in less favorable self-presentations on dimensions that are relevent to the available information, but more favorable ones on dimensions that are irrelevent.

When publicly known "facts" allow audiences to infer an actor's admirable qualities, he or she can afford to be modest. Actors thereby receive credit for possession of the attribute, don't risk censure for bragging, and gain additional positive regard for their modesty (e.g., Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Schneider, 1969; Ackerman & Schlenker, Note 1). At the same time, publicly successful actors can concentrate their self-presentations on qualities the audience values but may not already associate with them. If favorable facts about actors are unknown by the audience, however, actors' self-presentations on the relevent dimensions should be highly favorable in order to inform the audience of the accomplishment. Concomitantly, privately successful actors

might balance their aggrandizing self-presentations on relevent dimensions with less favorable self-presentations on less relevent ones in order to maintain their overall believeability (e.g., Stires & Jones, 1969).

Prior research has tended to focus on either the overall favorability of self-presentations summing over numerous dimensions or the favorableness of self-presentations on two or more dimensions each considered separately rather than as they form a within-subjects pattern. An attempt was made in the present study to complement these types of analyses with an examination of relative self-presentations across dimensions.

The present study examined self-presentations in a leadership situation, thereby focusing subjects on specific attributes (dimensions) that should be positively regarded by group members. Stogdill (1974) has identified three major dimensions of leader behavior that may also be important self-presentational dimensions for group leaders: competence, socioemotionality, and prominence. As self-presentational dimensions, competence refers to the appearance of possessing the requisite attributes and abilities to lead the group toward successful task completion; socioemotionality refers to the appearance of being warm, approachable, and interpersonally oriented; and prominence refers to the appearance of standing out from the group through interpersonal influence (i.e., seeming strong and powerful).

Subjects in the present study served as leaders of groups that did very well or very poorly on a decision-making task. Additionally, either the leader alone or the group-at-large was responsible for the performance, and the other group members supposedly did or did not know the locus of responsibility. Based on the reasoning above, the following hypotheses were tested. First, leaders should emphasize self-presentations of competence and prominence, relative to socioemotionality, to a greater degree when their responsibility for group success

is unknown by group members, but humbly deemphasize these attributes relative to socioemotionality, when personal responsibility for group success is public knowledge. In the first case, competence and prominence should be emphasized to inform group members of the leader's success while maintaining believeability through decreased claims of socioemotionality. In the latter case, leaders can humbly downplay success-related attributes while securing a desirable interpersonal attribute. Second, leaders who are responsible for failure should deemphasize competence relative to socioemotionality when responsibility is known rather than not known by group members. Leaders should be constrained by what the group knows about them, but attempt to compensate for task failure by stressing their socioemotional ability.

Method

Subjects

Fifty-six male and 72 female undergraduates partially fulfilled a class requirement through participation. Each served in one cell of the 2 (group success or failure) by 2 (leader or group responsible) by 2 (other group members do or do not know locus of responsibility) by 2 (subject sex) factorial. Subjects were run in four-person, same-sexed groups, but no two subjects in a single group served in the same manipulated cell of the design.

Procedure

Subjects were seated around a table that was partitioned into sections to eliminate visual contact. They first completed a bogus but seemingly face-valid measure of leadership ability which was purportedly used to assign one of the subjects to the role of group leader. It was stressed, however, that the person selected as the leader might or might not have the best leadership scores in the group, since the researchers were supposedly interested in seeing how people with different patterns of abilities perform in the leadership role. This was to prevent leaders from assuming that the other group members already

gave them credit for high leadership ability. In actuality, all four subjects were told they had been selected "the" group leader.

Subjects then worked individually on a set of three decision problems, each of which described a moral or legal dilemma and asked eight multiple choice questions about how the problem should be solved. The experimenter collected subjects' responses, pretended to make additional copies of the answers, and gave each subject a prearranged carbon copy that ostensibly showed how each of the other group members had answered the problems. Subjects were then asked to reconsider the problems in light of the others' answers and privately "vote" on the final decisions they thought the group as a whole should adopt.

After pretending to score the final answers, the experimenter gave subjects a feedback sheet indicating that the group had performed either very well, scoring in the 93rd percentile (success condition), or very poorly, scoring in the 31st percentile (failure condition). Subjects also learned that the group's score was based either on their final answers alone (leader responsible) or on an average of all members' final answers (group responsible); and that, as leader, only they knew how the score was calculated and that the other members would not be told at any time (responsibility not known) or that all group members had received a sheet explaining how the score was calculated (responsibility known).

Subjects then completed self-presentational questionnaires that they believed they would exchange with one another prior to working face-to-face on a second set of problems. (Since subjects might have assumed that group performance on the second set of problems would be calculated as on the first, thus confounding responsibility with past performance with expectations of future responsibility, all subjects were told that the scoring procedure would be different for Task Two: the leader would get two votes and each of

the other members one vote each for the final decisions.) The self-presentational questionnaire asked subjects to rate themselves on bipolar adjectives selected a priori to tap the three dimensions of interest. Upon completing a manipulation check questionnaire, subjects were fully debriefed.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Checks

The manipulations were effective in inducing the desired perceptions. Subjects believed that: their group performed better in the success than failure condition, $p < .001$; the scores were based primarily on their answers in the leader responsible condition and on the group's answers in the group responsible condition, $p < .001$; and the other members knew how the score was calculated in the known condition but did not in the not known condition, $p < .001$. Also, as desired, there were no differences in subjects' perceptions of how group performance would be calculated on Task Two as a function of the independent variables, $p > .45$.

Self-Presentations

Cronbach's alpha indicated that all three self-presentational dimensions demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability: competence (.74), prominence (.83), and socioemotionality (.75).

A split-plot analysis of variance was performed on the dimension means, treating the three dimensions as three levels of a within-subjects factor, and performance, responsibility, knowledge, and sex as between-group factors. The analysis revealed main effects of performance, F (1, 112) = 6.14, $p < .02$, responsibility, F (1, 112) = 7.61, $p < .01$, and dimension, F (2, 224) = 7.73, $p < .001$, a two-way interaction of sex X dimension, F (2, 224) = 17.27, $p < .001$, a three-way interaction of performance X knowledge X dimension, F (2, 224) = 3.23, $p < .05$, and a five-way interaction of performance X responsibility X

knowledge X sex X dimension, F (2, 224) = 4.77, $p < .01$. Means entering into the five-way interaction are presented in Table 1. Multiple comparisons were performed via tests of simple effects.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Although the hypotheses were not fully supported for either sex, males' self-presentations were generally more in line with predictions than females'. As predicted, males emphasized self-presentations of prominence and competence, relative to socioemotionality, to a greater degree when the leader was responsible for success and responsibility was not known rather than known by the group, $p < .05$. Further, males presented themselves as significantly more socioemotional when it was known rather than unknown that they were responsible for success, $p < .05$, suggesting that once their prominence and competence were recognized, males attempted to claim an additional positive attribute. However, although the means were in the appropriate direction, males who were responsible for success were not significantly more humble about their competence or prominence when responsibility was known rather than not known when those dimensions are considered individually. The predicted effects thus emerged in a subtle fashion, appearing most clearly when self-presentations are examined across the dimensions rather than within each dimension considered separately. When such a split-plot analysis is employed, the simple interaction of knowledge and dimension for males who are responsible for success reveals the anticipated pattern of relative humility versus braggardliness, $p < .05$.

It was predicted that following a leader-responsible failure, subjects would conform to publicly known facts and present themselves as less competent when responsibility was known rather than unknown. The prediction was not supported. Instead, the performance main effect indicated that subjects presented themselves less positively overall following failure rather than success; means are 5.1 and 5.4, respectively. Indeed, males who were responsible

for failure lowered their self-presentations of competence somewhat, as compared to males who were responsible for success, but this effect was not qualified by the group's knowledge of the locus of responsibility. Perhaps the fact that subjects expected to lead the others on a second task, where failure again might be likely, acted as a general constraint against claiming high degrees of competence following failure (cf. Schlenker, 1975; Wortman, Costanzo, & Witt, 1973).

Consistent with the compensation-following-failure hypothesis, males claimed greater socioemotional ability when responsibility was unknown and they were personally responsible for failure rather than success, $p < .05$. However, it was expected that there would be even greater compensation when responsibility for the failure was known rather than not known; a nonsignificant reversal occurred.

The females' self-presentations failed to support the hypotheses. Overall, the significant two-way interaction between sex and dimension indicated that females emphasized their socioemotionality over their prominence and competence, while males did the reverse. These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that females are more interpersonally oriented in group settings, while males are more task oriented (e.g., Kahn, Hottes, & Davis, 1971; Shaw, 1976). The only exception for females occurred in the success/group responsible/not known condition, where prominence and competence were emphasized and socioemotionality was deemphasized, $p < .05$. Although such an effect might suggest an attempt to associate oneself with the successful group outcome, it is not clear why it was limited only to this condition. One might conjecture that females, supposedly more familiar with traditional socioemotional rather than task roles, may have failed to realize the tactical possibilities of the task leadership situation. Alternatively, perhaps females recognized the possibilities but simply valued (or believed the other group members valued) socioemotional qualities in a leader more than tactical shifts in competence and prominence.

Whether such sex differences might be reversed in socioemotional leadership situations remains to be investigated.

In sum, the results showed that in task-oriented group situations, males' self-presentations across the three salient dimensions seemed to follow a tactical pattern. Males who were personally responsible for success emphasized their prominence and competence (attributes that are the most directly relevent to the success in the present situation) over their socioemotional ability only when the group did not know of their role in the achievement. Males also showed a significant compensation effect following failure, and were constrained in their claims of competence following failure. Females, in contrast, typically emphasized their socioemotionality over their competence and prominence irrespective of the particular combination of treatments. The examination of such sex differences has been relatively neglected in the self-presentation literature and should be scrutinized more fully in future research.

Finally, the use of a split-plot analysis to examine <u>patterns</u> of self-presentation on the three dimensions provided much information beyond simple attention to the individual dimensions and suggests that this approach may be a fruitful one in future self-presentational research. In any social encounter, individuals present a myriad of impressions that may be categorized along a number of dimensions. Analysis of the relative emphases placed on these dimensions tells us a great deal about the particular aspects of one's "face" that the individual considers important and, thus, stresses in the encounter.

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Table 1

Effects of Group Performance, Responsibility, Knowledge of Responsibility, and Subject Sex on Self-presentations of Prominence, Socioemotionality, and Competence

Males

			Prominence	Socioemotionality	Competence
Success	Leader Resp.	Known	4.8	4.9	5.4
		Not known	5.3	4.1	5.6
	Group Resp.	Known	5.3	5.3	5.7
		Not Known	5.5	5.3	5.6
Failure	Leader Resp.	Known	4.7	4.7	5.1
		Not Known	4.7	5.3	5.0
	Group Resp.	Known	5.5	4.9	5.6
		Not Known	5.3	4.5	5.5

Females

			Prominence	Socioemotionality	Competence
Success	Leader Resp.	Known	5.3	5.6	5.5
		Not Known	5.1	5.7	5.3
	Group Resp.	Known	5.3	5.9	5.4
		Not Known	5.6	4.8	5.6
Failure	Leader Resp.	Known	4.8	5.4	5.2
		Not Known	4.3	5.2	4.9
	Group Resp.	Known	4.9	5.7	5.2
		Not Known	5.2	5.4	5.4

Note: Scores could range from 1 (negative) to 7 (positive).